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A man in a white shirt, dark vest, and dark trousers stands in a modern interior. The room features wood-paneled walls, a concrete ledge, and a large window. The man is smiling and has his hands on his hips. The background shows a dining area with wooden chairs.

# Architect profile

## Paul McAneary

In this penthouse apartment, Paul McAneary set a series of 'boxes' in an open-plan space, and used the textures of wood, metal, brick and concrete to decorative effect. By **Judith Wilson**

PHOTOGRAPHY JAKE CURTIS



Northern-Irish-born Paul McAneary studied architecture at the Oxford School of Architecture, and the Architectural Association. After joining architectural practices in Hong Kong and Japan, he returned to London and worked with John Pawson. Paul set up his own practice in 2007. He embraces the rigours of minimalism, and for him, perfection is all - he and his team of 10 'love the nanodetail'. Current projects include a newbuild house overlooking Wimbledon Common, the development of a boutique hotel in Old Street, and two galleries in London. Paul McAneary Architects won the Living Space Design of the Year 2011 for the Tex-Tonic House 1, the second year in a row that the firm has won this award.

'My South African clients wanted to build a modern penthouse on the top floor of the Phillips de Pury auction house in Victoria. In an invited competition, five architects were asked to come up with a design. We won. The apartment is 510 square metres, and was eight months in construction. My clients wanted a loft-style space, but planning restrictions demanded the need for firewalls. We challenged this, and came up with a technical strategy to reinterpret the building regulations.

'Our solution was a trio of "boxes" at one end of the main living space. These house three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and work as sculptural forms as well as providing privacy. The door to each box is hidden, with no architrave, which was our way of respecting the use of timber. In the centre of the living space we have added a double-sided fireplace. The concrete was cast in timber shuttering, to create a robust texture, and the structure acts as a room divider, yet gives transparency.

'I experiment with natural materials to create a warm minimalism. The floor is engineered and sandblasted French oak, polished with olive oil and white oil, and finished with a hard-wax oil. By contrast, the beams and two of the boxes are sandblasted English oak, wire-brushed to bring out the texture. We forced the oak to dry unnaturally fast, so that it would crack and warp. The central box is bronze, cast in a mould constructed from wire-brushed and sandblasted Douglas fir. We used a chemical process to create the blackened patina, brushed back to reveal the bronze underneath. I like to take risks. We constantly research new materials and techniques.

'On the back wall, we've used reclaimed London stock bricks. They have been deliberately left unpointed, and laid out of level, for textural contrast. There is also a feature wall in the cloakroom. I've used lava stone, laser-cut into 10mm-thick slabs. It provides a fresh take on a traditional stone wall, and encourages people to reach out and touch. I liked the idea of creating drama in here, as so often these rooms are too small. The free-standing basin is by Matthew Thun for Catalano. The water flows through an illuminated acrylic tube, to create a "wow" factor.

'At their highest point, the walls are six metres tall, so there was sufficient volume to include a mezzanine floor, accessed via a cantilevered oak staircase and glass landing. Our clients are wine buffs, so we've created a "floating" wine cellar. It is a fresh interpretation of the typical basement wine cellar. The wine bottles are supported on tension wires, so it is possible to turn them to read the



OPPOSITE Paul McAneary stands in the living area of the Tex-Tonic House 1 penthouse in London, which he and his team transformed into a 'loft-style space'. THIS PAGE FROM TOP A living wall runs the length of the perimeter of the building. A trio of 'boxes' - one of which (left of picture) is of bronze cast in a wooden mould to replicate its texture - house bedrooms and bathrooms. The wine 'cellar' is on the mezzanine level. A wall in the cloakroom is made from lava stone



labels without taking them out. Sound and lighting were crucial in this vast space. What resemble plain painted-plaster panels in the ceiling are actually acoustic panels, to soften the sound. We have used bespoke recessed LED uplighters throughout.

'I like to provide clients with a complete vision. We designed the walnut kitchen table and bench. This is an urban apartment, but I wanted to create a connection with nature, so, beyond the terrace, there is a living wall, which runs the full 57-metre perimeter of the building. I worked closely with a plant specialist, and the foliage is designed to change as the seasons progress.

'My client still e-mails me to pass on compliments when new visitors see the Tex-Tonic House 1. That's the best thing about being an architect. A happy client makes all the late nights worthwhile' □

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